

EASTHAM COMMUNITY-WIDE HISTORIC PROPERTIES SURVEY
Town of Eastham, Massachusetts
Final Report
August 9, 2013

ABSTRACT

This intensive level survey project involved documenting historic resources/properties on behalf of the Eastham Historical Commission (EHC). This involved the completing 67 individual inventory forms (B forms) and 10 Area forms that encompassed another 100 buildings. The pre-20th-century architecture in the Town of Eastham had been surveyed fairly comprehensively.^a Based on this, the EHC determined it would focus the bulk of the survey for properties along three roads—Old State Highway, Ellis Road, and State Highway with cottage colonies and pre-World War II properties prioritized. Evaluations of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places resulted in three properties recommended for nomination.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PROPERTIES FOR THE SURVEY UPDATE

The EHC provided a preliminary survey list of ten properties on Old State Highway and thirteen on Ellis Road. After field checking these properties in early December 2012, cross-checking with MACRIS, and some initial historical research, the number of Ellis Road properties was reduced to nine and those with Old State Highway addresses reduced to two. In addition, a review of previously completed inventory forms by Kathryn Grover found three that had little historical background and clearly needed updating; these were added to the survey list.^b To determine which State Highway properties would be candidates to be surveyed as a part of this project, an Excel database of the Town's tax parcels was obtained from the Town Assessor and sorted by construction dates (with the realization that many of these dates would be incorrect) and compared to the properties listed in MACRIS. However, this gave us a process by which to select additional properties to be surveyed. The Town Assessors' records listed 357 properties on State Highway, 45 of which had been previously surveyed. LFA created a preliminary list from the remaining 312 properties that were either mid-20th century cabin colonies or constructed prior to WW II. Although the EHC anticipated that the southernmost portion of State Highway would provide the balance of properties, the list that was generated ran the entire length of this arterial road. After a second field check of these properties in mid-January and comparison of the Assessor's properties having 18th- and 19th-century building dates with properties already surveyed (listed on MACRIS) several early buildings were identified as not yet surveyed; these were added to the survey list. Final selection was made after a review of these findings with the EHC at its January 15, 2013, meeting.

METHODOLOGY

Completion of the survey forms followed the standard methodology set forth in the "Historic Properties Survey Manual" issued and updated by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The process included field inspection with on-site notational and photographic recording, archival research, association with architectural and historical contexts, and assessment of significance and eligibility for the National Register of Historic Resources.

Beyond field work to document and describe the physical characteristics of the selected properties, PDF files of health department (building) records were reviewed for information about alterations to the subject buildings. The survey also involved substantial research in this town and county historical literature, vital records, federal and state censuses, town directories,

^a The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) listed 623 surveyed properties (581 buildings, 4 cemeteries, 10 objects, and 27 structures) with additional properties within 15 Area Forms.

^b These property addresses are 345, 1685, and 5155 State Highway.

selected military records, genealogies, and historic maps to establish histories of occupancy. Constructing house histories is inhibited by the absence of directories and censuses for the years before 1850 and after 1940. Beyond this the historical research was difficult for several reasons. First, no maps of Eastham illustrating buildings with owners' names predate 1858 and only two such maps exist after that date (1880 and 1905/1910). Second, only two town directories exist—1901 and 1929—and neither show house numbers. Nor does any federal census for the town, through 1940, include house numbers. The Eastham Historical Society and the EHC's house files and oral were of limited use due to lack of specific references in most. Finally, published local histories provide virtually no information on Eastham's built environment.

Fortunately, two sources made it possible to identify house owners and occupants with relative confidence: the online Barnstable County Registry of Deeds. This source permits one to search for deed and plans by owners' names to the earliest years of the 1800s (many Massachusetts registries permit online searches into nineteenth-century deeds only by recorded land book and page number). Still, the earlier the deed the more general the description of land and the more likely it is to be measured in rods or degrees. Thus it is often not possible to trace a particular parcel with certainty earlier than about 1850.

The second good source is a group of "tax commitment books" maintained by the Town of Eastham, the earliest being for the year 1902. Between that year and 1926 no such books have been found, but after 1926 these records appear to have survived for most if not all ensuing years. These records identify properties by owners' name, not by street or road; they identify buildings by type (including asparagus and cranberry houses), homestead lots, and other lots by type (asparagus land, orchard, and woodland, for example). Eastham Assessors identified several distinct dwelling types—house, cottage, cabin, camp, double camp, camp house, tent camp, even "Celetex camp," apparently a plastic or fiberboard enclosure made partly from sugar cane fiber. How the Assessors understood the difference between house, cottage, and cabin in particular is not explained in tax records, and there is often little difference in value between houses and cottages. It may be that by "cabin" they meant to designate a wood-frame tourist shelter, while cottages were architecturally different from houses but, like them, year-round properties meant for year-round residents. Camps were probably unheated and unplumbed and meant, as cabins probably were, for summer use only. What these terms meant at the time deserves deeper examination.

By 1947, if not slightly earlier, tax records designate not only property type and value but also the location of properties by block and lot number and sometimes also by deed book and page number. This made it possible to identify properties with a precision no other source permitted. The tax commitment books were invaluable to this survey, and they should be consulted in any future property survey.

Vital records (accessible to 1915 online at the American Ancestors website and into the 1960s, in some cases, on Ancestry.com) and reputable genealogies were used to document family relationships, which often influence settlement patterns and property transfer, and to provide biographical detail on property occupants and owners.

INFORMATION RECORDED FOR SURVEYED PROPERTIES

The documentation recorded on MHC-approved inventory forms includes the following information:

- Assessors parcel ID number
- Assigned MHC inventory number
- Property address
- Construction date (or range of dates)
- Credit with the surveyors' names and the sponsoring organization (EHC)
- The date (month/year) in which the form was completed

- Architectural description
- Historical narrative covering the history of the subject property, its subdivision over time, and background information on the owners, particularly those deemed responsible for construction of the primary building. (In general, information about responsible architects and builders was unavailable.)
- A locus map illustrating property lines and cross streets
- Current photographic images, in color and at a resolution of 3 to 6 megapixels of the street facade(s) of each building, with a three-quarter view for corner buildings.
- Bibliography and/or references
- Site plans with reference to photos (for Area forms) and/or Supplemental images (plat maps where applicable)

In those cases where a property appeared eligible for listing in the National Register, a National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form was appended.

In addition to the inventory forms for each property, an Excel database listing the properties (organized by street names then numbers) was created. See Attachment A for print-out of the list.

PROPERTIES RECOMMENDED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Three properties appear to be eligible for the National Register at a local level of significance. They are:

- EAS.618: 45 South Eastham St. (Assessor # 21-11-A); individual, “Abijah & Phebe Mayo House,” constructed c. 1850
- EAS.619: 175 State Highway (Assessor # 20-1271-A); individual, “Reuben & Hannah Cole House,” constructed c. 1760
- EAS.X (EAS.712-EAS.722*): 3280-3298 State Highway (Assessor #s 11-49-A-J); district; “Nauset Haven,” constructed 1830 & 1937-1955

*The MHC numbers assigned to these buildings have changed since this list was first provided in Phase III of this project.

LOCUS & BASE MAPS

LFA utilized the Massachusetts state-wide GIS system, “Oliver” to create Locus Maps for each inventory form, as this was the only means by which to show building footprints.^c

Base survey maps were cobbled together from 14 of the Town of Eastham’s section maps provided on its website. LFA had jpg files made of each and, using a Photoshop program, outlined the surveyed parcels and labeled them with the assigned MHC inventory number.

Please see Attachment B for copies of the base maps.

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^c <http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map_ol/oliver.php>

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REPOSITORY

The results of this survey are located with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) at 220 Morrissey Blvd. in Boston, as well as with the Eastham Historical Commission archives at the Eastham Public Library located at 190 Samoset Road in Eastham.

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